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FREEDOM OF TEACHING:

A

REPLY

TO AN ATTACK IN THE

BOSTON WATCHMAN AND REFLECTOR.

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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OF the papers forming this little tract, the first was printed in the "Watchman and Reflector" in answer to an attack upon me by a writer in that journal, and was accompanied by long editorial comments, to which the second paper is a reply. This second paper, with the exception of the notes, and a paragraph or two, was offered to the editor and refused, on the score of its length; I had therefore no alternative but to remain silent or print it myself. Nothing but the feeling that I and the institution to which I belong had been placed in a false position would have induced me to obtrude myself and my opinions upon the attention of the public. I wish simply to correct misrepresentations and misapprehensions; to assume the entire responsibility of any oversight I may have committed, if any can be fairly proved against me, and to place, if possible, the question of the proper method of historical and literary teaching upon a footing which will be acknowledged to be the right one by all fair-minded men. If I can do this, the controversy, perhaps, will not have proved an unprofitable one.

For a lecturer to make an unfair use of his opportunities to inculcate certain theological dogmas, whether orthodox or unorthodox, is one thing; for him to speak of historical or literary subjects from his own point of view, whether that be orthodox or unorthodox, is quite another. To deny him that privilege would be virtually to shut the mouth of every lecturer who did not chance to agree with all the dogmas of some particular religious creed which is covertly assumed to be infallible. No teacher with a single spark of independence would consent to be tongue-tied, or else to conform his whole method of teaching to some system of thought in which he did not believe. The institution of learning which submits to such dictation becomes at once a sectarian institution, for it is simply impossible to deal with literary or historical subjects in any manner that deserves the name of teaching, unless upon *some* theory. The philosophy of history of Bossuet is radically different from the philosophy of history of Guizot, and that again from the phi-

losophy of Auguste Comte. The view which a Roman Catholic lecturer would take of the English Reformation or of the writings of John Milton, would differ *toto cælo* from those which an Anglican churchman would take; and these again would differ fundamentally from those of a New England Puritan or a Genevan Calvinist or Mr. Froude. I cannot see how this is to be helped. Either history and literature are to become the unmeaning things which they have become in so many of our school manuals and compendiums, or a lecturer is to have liberty to speak in accordance with the faith that is in him, — candidly, fairly and courteously always, and with no assumption of authority: and thus speaking he has a right to claim a confidence on the part of his hearers that he, in common with themselves, is only endeavoring to find out the truth.

I did not suppose I should be misunderstood, when I said that I should be happy to invite a scholar belonging to the Baptist sect to lecture for me on historical or literary subjects, as intending to say that I should be happy to invite him to give a lecture on Baptist *theology*, but I believe I have been so understood. The idea of turning a college lecture-room into an arena for sectarian disputes, is so absurd that it did not occur to me that such an interpretation would be put upon my proposal. On the other hand, it seems to me that he would give but a shallow and unprofitable lecture on many of the grave subjects which constitute the essence both of history and literature if he did not let it very plainly be seen what form of religious faith underlay his philosophy. And is not the emptiness and unprofitableness of so much of our teaching mainly due to that moral cowardice which, for fear of exciting sectarian animosity, dwells only on the surface of the subject, and never penetrates to those thoughts which are all that make such subjects worthy of study? Two eminent gentlemen have done me the honor to lecture in my place; it was plain to me, though they said no word on theology, what some of their religious opinions were, and where I differed from and where I agreed with them. That seems to me to be the true *unfaithfulness* which my critic talks about, either to have no opinions, or, having them, meanly to conceal them.

I ought perhaps to add that the evening course of lectures, one of which gave so much offence to my critic, was *not* addressed to a class of young persons, but to a miscellaneous audience of adults, to whom the attempt to apply class teaching would have been simply an absurdity. I had to accommodate

the form of my address to the character of the audience which presented itself.

I have constantly spoken of history and literature together, because I do not see how, in any instruction worth giving, they can possibly be separated. Literature becomes a poor and contemptibly shallow belletristic affair when taken out of its connection with history, and treated as anything but what it really is, the history of a nation's thought.

The nature of the attack that has been made upon me will, I think, be a justification in the eyes of those readers to whom this tract is chiefly addressed for appending to these two articles the substance of a private letter to a friend, who asked me for further information as to the exact nature of my religious belief, which, as I was *not* giving theological lectures, of course only came out incidentally. I print the letter because, as what is called in current theological parlance a "rationalist," I am supposed by many very good people not to believe anything; when in fact on the most fundamental points of religious belief I am really at one with what are called "orthodox" believers. I have no disposition to parade my opinions before the public on such sacred subjects, but on the other hand, I have no opinions which I am ashamed to avow. My views on some points considered vital by many, are doubtless very unorthodox, but the time is fast going by, except among the most ignorant and bigoted of sectarians, when it is considered a mark of moral turpitude to differ from the opinion of the majority in points of speculative belief.

I am little concerned to defend myself against writers who merely drop into my lecture-room on purpose to find ground for quarrel or material for a cheap newspaper sensation by attacking a wholly unsectarian school. I *am* concerned to apologize to my real audience and to exonerate the Institute of Technology from all responsibility if I have incautiously overstepped any boundary which in lectures delivered in such a school it is right and proper to set up. That boundary would be set at very different points, however, by different persons. The bigot, determined that no opinion but his own shall have a hearing, would set it in one place; the candid inquirer, determined to hear all sides, at quite another. A lecturer who, like that late eminent and excellent man, the chemist Faraday, believed that the lines of scientific and religious thought ran parallel, but never touched, could lecture on magnetism at the Royal Institution, and then preach, as he was wont to do, in the little "Sande-

manian " church in which he was a deacon,\* without the least danger of his theology offending his scientific hearers, or his science undermining the faith of his church. But a lecturer on history and literature who, while agreeing with the orthodox believer in viewing all History as governed by Divine Law, looks upon creeds and churches as only the representatives of successive developments of man's religious nature, just as much as sciences and philosophies are the successive results of the progress of his intellect nearer and nearer towards absolute Truth, such a lecturer has sometimes a delicate task to determine what is and what is not appropriate to his circumstances and his place. I have repelled with the contempt which it deserves the charge of "propagandism," of unfairly making use of my opportunities to advocate a particular creed. Have I, or have I not, in the earnestness with which I hold to that philosophy of history which seems to me to be true, unconsciously laid such stress upon my own religious views, or so criticised the views of others as to give offence to any candid hearer? Those only can determine who heard the whole of my course. I certainly did not think I was transgressing legitimate bounds when, for instance, in speaking of the recent Spanish Revolution, and in connection with that the fall of Spain from the height of her ancient greatness, I traced that fall in part to the intolerance and bigotry of the Spanish people, and read from an article in the Quarterly Review a picturesque account of a Spanish *auto da fé*. What is historical instruction good for if we are not to draw such lessons from it? As little did I think myself violating any proprieties, when I read from the printed copy of the Encyclical Letter of Pius IX. in connection with what I had to say of the Ecumenical Council, or when I quoted, in connection with some remarks on Protestantism and its progress, that frightful saying, which has come down to us from St. Augustine, that one of the pleasures of heaven will consist in looking over its battlements at the torments of the damned below. These are matters of history, and how are we to deal with history adequately, if we omit all mention of them in their proper place? But my critic would give the impression that my whole course of eighteen lectures was made up of such material, when, in fact, nearly the whole of what could be twisted into theological discussion, or, as

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\* See the recent biography of Faraday, by Dr. Bence Jones.



my critic phrases it, "infidel propagandism" was confined to only two. In those two I perhaps, unfortunately, made use of a discourse prepared for an occasion on which I could not, by any ingenuity, be supposed to be hampered by professorial proprieties. If, in using such material, I really offended, I wish to apologize — not to my critic, who came to take offence, — but to my real audience; and, in doing so, wish to exonerate the Institute of Technology from all responsibility, by taking the whole blame upon myself. I am as entirely of the opinion that the Institute of Technology is not to be made the arena for sectarian controversy, on the one hand, as I am, on the other, that, in all schools of learning that deserve the name, the instructors, while giving their instruction calmly, impartially, and honestly, should be permitted frankly to state their own point of view. The question, in regard to any particular teacher, must always be mainly a question of confidence in his personal integrity. Is he an honest and impartial seeker after truth? or is he covertly abusing his opportunities unduly to influence the minds of his pupils, or to build up some orthodox or unorthodox sect? On this point I am very ready to abide by the judgment of those who really know me. The conception of an unsectarian school, very common among a certain class of people is, that a padlock shall be put upon the mouths of all its teachers, in regard to all subjects ever so remotely connected with religion, in order that all instruction on such subjects may be confined to institutions which are avowedly sectarian. I cannot speak for others, but for my part, I would rather send my son to be taught by an honest man, whose opinions differed most widely from my own, than to a man who was so indifferent to all ethical truth that he cared not on what principles he based his instruction.

It is perhaps incumbent on me to make another explanation. I had made considerable progress during the summer vacation on the preparation of a course of lectures on the History and Literature of England during the eighteenth century, in the hope that sufficient assistance would be furnished me in the multifarious duties of my regular instruction to give me leisure to complete the preparation of this course for my evening audience. In this I was disappointed. My only assistance was the volunteer assistance of friends, and I was obliged to notify my evening audience of a necessary departure from my programme. In my very first lecture I gave notice that on Monday evenings I should discuss the subject — often extemporaneously — of the present aspect of affairs abroad and at home, as the latest

chapter of history, using as my materials the current literature of the day, and going back into the past to find the explanation of the present; on Thursday evenings I should be obliged to read old lectures, some of which I had had the honor of delivering some years ago at the Lowell Institute. On this footing I had the pleasure of retaining a small but regular and apparently much interested audience, in spite of the remoteness of my lecture-room and the length of the course. Occasionally, during the latter part of the series, stray hearers would drop in; and I believe it is in consequence of having had the honor of the occasional attendance of such auditors, that I have become the object of newspaper abuse.

It is unnecessary for me to say that no one but myself is in the remotest degree responsible for any sentiment or opinion advanced in this pamphlet. There are, I believe, in the Faculty of the Institute of Technology, representatives of a very great variety of religious beliefs.

W. P. A.

## I.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE WATCHMAN AND REFLECTOR:—

A friend has just brought to my notice an article in your issue of last week by a contributor who comments on one of the lectures in my evening Lowell course at the Institute of Technology. The garbled report of the single lecture, which is the only one your contributor seems to have attended, gives about as correct an idea of the true spirit of the whole as the distorted portrait of a caricature paper. With the *animus* and intention of the communication, however, I do not wish here to concern myself, but only to claim a little of your space in order to correct some of your contributor's misconceptions.

The lecture which he heard was one of a short series in which I had undertaken to give an account of some of the present aspects of European affairs, considered as a part of history, endeavoring, as I proceeded, to trace the causes of present phenomena in the records of the past. Of course, the religious questions of the day, especially in connection with the Council of the Romish church, came in for a share of notice, as they must wherever historical questions, whether relating to the present or the past, are properly treated. As I am an anti-supernaturalist in my religious views, I, of course, dealt with such subjects as I was bound to do as an honest thinker, from the anti-supernatural point of view.

Your contributor must be singularly ignorant of the condition of religious thought at the present day if he does not know that there is a large and rapidly increasing class of thoughtful and earnestly religious persons in this and all other intellectual communities, — though perhaps in his intolerance he may be inclined to refuse them the name of religious, — who, disbelieving altogether the miraculous element in the Gospel narratives as entirely as they disbelieve the stories of the miracles of Popish saints, and rejecting the "Bibliolatry" current in the sects, do yet accept all the great fundamental truths which Jesus preached, of love to God and love to man, of repentance for sin, and accountability to and dependence on a Father in heaven, and who, therefore, consider themselves as much entitled

to the name of Christian as any so-called "Evangelical" Christian, who certainly, if he is a consistent Protestant, makes no claim to infallibility for his sect or his creed. The Christianity which he, in common with the Roman Catholic, believes to have been a miraculous dispensation, such persons as I am describing believe to be the result of the normal development of man's religious nature as given in history. They may be in error, and so may be their opponents, but their opponents cannot afford to despise them, and give very poor evidence of their own Christian spirit when they attempt to misrepresent them. It might be wholesome for your contributor, if he is acquainted with the history of his own sect, to recall the days when Baptists were persecuted, before he attempts to excite prejudice against a teacher whose faith is as sincere as his own.

As it is my belief that the religious sentiment is the strongest of all the elements in human nature, I should conceive it a gross dereliction of duty if I, as a lecturer on literature, which is only the record of human thought, or on history, which is the record of human action, should fail to point out that practical influence of dogmas and opinions on action which constitutes the very essence of history. Religious opinions are a part of literature and a part of history. What would be thought of the honesty or impartiality of a historian who should write history on the principle of omitting everything that might by any possibility be distasteful to his readers? I cannot conceive what I can have said to give your contributor the impression that I thought I was doing anything wrong in dealing with the religious questions of the day as a part of current history. I shall make haste to revise my lecture, and erase any expression that could possibly bear such an interpretation. Perhaps your contributor thinks it wrong to utter any opinions on religious topics save what *he* believes to be the truth.

He seems to have taken offence at my mention by name of certain living divines. I cannot see any objection to it, even if I had criticised them as living preachers, as I certainly intended them no disrespect. My reference, however, was a passing one to certain published *books* of those gentlemen which form a part of current literature, to wit, a book entitled "Eternal Punishment Consistent with the Fatherhood of God," published in 1861 by Rev. Dr. Thompson, pastor of the Tabernacle church in New York; a work entitled "The State of the Impenitent Dead," by Rev. Prof. Hovey, of the Newton Baptist Institution; and a sermon by Rev. Dr. Nehemiah Adams, entitled "The Reasona-

bleness of Future Endless Punishment." I simply mentioned them in correction of a rather inadvertent statement made in a previous lecture, that the so-called "orthodox" sects were no longer much disposed to dwell on that particular dogma.

Your contributor inquires whether opportunity would be given at the Institute of Technology for the presentation of views opposed to those of the professor. I would say in reply that I always try to give a fair presentation of such views myself, as, for instance, of the supernatural theory of religion; and further, that in the temporary lack of a sufficient number of teachers in the departments of which I have charge, I am in the habit of sometimes inviting to lecture for me such friends as can give an able presentation of opposite views of disputed questions. Thus, two gentlemen eminently qualified to give a forcible exposition of their respective opinions, have promised to lecture to my class in Political Economy, one in favor of Protectionist, and the other of Free Trade views. So far as I am personally concerned, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to invite to my lecture-room any competent scholar who would do me the honor to give to my classes the Baptist view of any ethical, political, literary or historical subject, although I must be permitted seriously to doubt whether the same courtesy would be extended to me in any Baptist or other denominational institution of learning.

Our large hall is not yet finished, though I trust it soon will be. I speak without authority, but I think I hazard nothing in saying that not only would the government of the Institute not have objected to its use if it had been ready, for the delivery of the course of public lectures now being given in Freeman Place Chapel, but would most cordially consent to such use. I have the honor of counting more than one of the gentlemen giving that course among my personal friends,—no difference of speculative opinion need interfere with the mutual regard of honest men,—and so highly do I respect their opinions and estimate the value of free discussion as the only foundation for sound belief, and so important do I consider it to accustom my students to think for themselves, that I have this morning been taking your contributor's communication and this answer as a text with one of my classes for a discussion on the subject of freedom of speech and the duty of cultivating a habit of independent thought on all important subjects, and in that connection have earnestly recommended them to attend the Freeman Place lectures, as well as the course by equally sincere and

earnest men, given on Sundays in Horticultural Hall, as one of the methods for getting light on questions of the profoundest importance. For no one—such is the doctrine I teach my students—can be said really to know about a question in debate until he has heard all that can be said on both sides of it. I had thought this to be sound Protestant doctrine. In no institution of learning where such freedom of thought is not inculcated, can historical, or literary, or even scientific subjects be adequately treated. Scientific questions themselves give rise, as we all know, to the most divergent opinions in regard to the metaphysical foundations of belief. Are such questions to be ignored for fear of what people are pleased to call heresy? And if so, where is the infallible Protestant church which shall define for us the limits within which freedom of thought is allowable? I had thought that that theory was confined to Roman Catholics.

[I ought, perhaps, here to have explained more fully when the article was first published, the nature of the exercise in which this discussion found its appropriate place. It is my custom to give from time to time with each of my classes a lesson or lecture on the topics of the day, and the history, not of the past, but of the times in which we are living, using as the materials for such lessons the current numbers of respectable papers and really able articles in the magazines and reviews as they successively make their appearance. Thus I endeavor, to the best of my ability, to keep the students acquainted with the current of European and American politics, going back into the past for an explanation of the phenomena of the present, and striving to set them thinking on those topics on many of which they will have to take action in the future. I do not know but this is an unusual course to take in academical instruction, and contrary to old precedents, which would confine such instruction to the antideluvian world and the affairs of Greeks and Romans, but that seems to me to be no argument against its utility. If there is anything a young American needs to be taught, it is *how* to read his newspaper; if there are any questions he needs to understand, they are the great questions of the day in Europe and America; and, inasmuch as the papers did me and my doings the honor to make them the subject of their comments, and as the question at issue is one of the most momentous that can engage our attention, the question, namely, of real freedom of thought and the right method of investigating truth, a question on which I am neither ashamed nor afraid of my

position, and further, as it is of prime importance to students thoroughly to understand their teacher, I thought it a good opportunity to fix my pupils' attention on an abstract question by taking advantage of an occurrence in which they naturally felt a personal interest. The difficulty in didactic teaching lies in discovering the right means for exciting a lively interest; and the value of such teaching consists not so much in the importance of the facts as in the stimulus given to independent thought on the part of the learner. Nothing, for instance, is more difficult than to get good themes written on the subject of the cardinal virtues; as witness the common type of school "compositions." But I find that young men can write extremely well upon such a subject, say, as the position of woman, if I can interest them in the argument of Mr. Mill or the criticism of Sir Henry Taylor. Such proceedings will, I fear, appear very dangerous in the eyes of conservatives, and among such questions I should not of course introduce questions of technical theology. But on the other hand, *all* real thought is dangerous. Nothing is altogether "safe" but dulness.]

I have myself but one rule in lecturing, the rule which every sincere and earnest person must follow, to say on every subject exactly what I think. A lecturer on history and literature, subjects which legitimately include all moral and religious speculation, would do scant justice to his theme, if, for fear of hurting the sensibilities of somebody in his audience, he were to avoid the subject of religion. He would be unworthy to address the public at all if he were dishonest enough to conceal his real opinions. It will never be my course while I have the honor to be a public teacher; but your contributor would have better understood what my real opinions are, if he had had the patience to attend all my lectures.

I remain,

Your obedient servant,

W. P. ATKINSON.

## II.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE WATCHMAN AND REFLECTOR:—

As your contributor, in his comments on my communication in your last issue, persists in his misrepresentations, I must claim a share of your columns to make another attempt to repel his

attack. I am sorry I was not more successful in making myself understood in my first article.

All through his comments, as in his first attack, there was the grave confusion of thought which consists in confounding a difference of religious opinion with an assault on religion itself, and the incidental discussion of religious subjects, in literary and historical lectures, with the giving of theological instruction. When he points out that I differ from him in religious opinion, he states what I am very happy to admit; when he charges me with assaulting religion itself, he slanders me. When he tells his readers that I have been giving a course of theological, or what he calls "infidel," lectures at the Institute of Technology, he states what, if he had attended them, he would have known not to be the truth.

His criticism may thus be divided into three parts. The first consists in a charge against me of attacking religion in my public lectures, and in an attempt to excite against me the *odium theologicum* by calling me an "infidel"; the second, in an accusation of lecturing under false pretences; the third, in an argument in defence of abridging liberty of speech in the historical and literary instruction given at scientific schools, and other institutions of learning. Let me notice the three points separately. And first let me ask what precisely is meant when my critic calls me an "infidel"? The etymological meaning of the word infidel is "unfaithful"; its usual meaning is "unbeliever"; but unfaithful to what, and unbeliever in what? Obviously in any critic's mouth, it can only mean unfaithful to and unbeliever in his particular religious views, with the implied assumption that they are infallibly correct. Suppose, now, that I were to turn round and call him an infidel, because he is unfaithful to and an unbeliever in *my* religious views; — would not the process in the one case be as legitimate as the other? If it is being in the majority for the time being which makes the difference, what then would become of the early Baptists, who were in a small minority enough; what would become of the claim of the early Christians? Plainly, it is as legitimate for me to call him an infidel because he disbelieves in my views, as it is for him to call me an infidel for disbelieving in his; or else he is prepared to maintain that he is infallibly right in his view of the Bible and of Jesus; and as a Protestant I presume he does not take that ground, inasmuch as he has no infallible Pope to fall back upon. It comes to this, then: that he views parts of my religious belief as utterly erroneous; just as I view parts of



his religious belief as utterly erroneous; just as we both view parts of the Roman Catholic or the Swedenborgian religious belief, as utterly erroneous. But what is gained by calling each other infidels, except, perhaps, a certain amount of ill-feeling on both sides, inasmuch as the applying of invidious epithets is usually considered among gentlemen tantamount to an insult? And, therefore, although I have precisely the same right to call my critic an "infidel," which he has to call me one, no more and no less, I shall not do so, because I think the exchange of insulting epithets is of all ways the worst to carry on an argument. Let us confine ourselves, like rational beings, to the task of mutually showing, if we can, the errors in each other's views. By that the cause of Truth will be a gainer; it will never be promoted by the assumption of infallibility, or by calling names. Happily this talk about "infidelity," "infidel propagandism," when used, as my critic uses it, against such men, for instance, as Mr. Channing, Mr. Weiss, Mr. Longfellow, and the other speakers at Horticultural Hall, is becoming as harmless as the Pope's bulls of excommunication which it imitates. It influences none but the ignorant and the unthinking. I believe I can afford to pass it by without further notice. It is unworthy of candid men, and belongs to the lowest and worst style of bygone theological disputation.

I do not know whether my opponent expected me to make a recantation of all my principles in consequence of his attack, but he seems surprised at my method of correcting him. Does he not know that the worst sort of misrepresentation is that which attributes to a speaker's words a *spirit* different from that which really pervaded them? I am perfectly ready to defend, to the best of my ability, all the statements and sentiments put forth in any of my lectures, and when I am proved to be in the wrong, to acknowledge it candidly. It was the spirit attributed to me, and the false aspect given to my statements by taking them out of connection with the discourses which my critic did not give himself the trouble to come and hear, that I complained of. It is one thing for a lecturer to deal with a subject which it belongs legitimately to him to treat, in a legitimate way and in its proper place, from his own point of view, whether that be "orthodox" or unorthodox; it is quite another thing to be charged with abusing his position, and striving under false pretences to be a "propagandist" of moral or immoral doctrine. That is the charge which I repudiate with the contempt which it deserves. And yet this is the slanderous charge which, all

through both his communications, your contributor brings against me. Knowing about a few things I do not believe, which he considers necessary to salvation, but knowing absolutely nothing of what I do believe, because he has taken no pains to learn, he yet undertakes to denounce my character and excite popular prejudice against me and the institution in which I teach. I do not wish to charge him with wilful misrepresentation, because I do not know him; I am willing to believe him honest in his prejudices. I only maintain that he is writing of what he really knows nothing about, to wit, any actual faith and the real spirit of my teaching.

To his second charge, that I abused my position as a lecturer to give a course of theological lectures in disguise, I shall content myself with a flat denial, and, proceeding to the third and main point, try to explain what I did attempt to do.

That third point is the really important question of the proper method of treating historical, literary and philosophical subjects in academical teaching and in public lectures. My critic claims that they should either be treated with the careful omission of all theological allusions, or else, that if theology is introduced at all, it must be *his* theology on pain of the lecturer being held up to public opprobrium as an "infidel." Let me try his theory by an example or two. I have recently been reading, with reference to some future lectures, the political and literary history of England during the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries. Will my critic tell me how I, as a professor of literature, am to give an adequate account of the intellectual life of England at that period without dealing pretty largely in theology? Would he have me omit the early struggles for freedom of his own sect? (I should think they would make him blush at the thought of his own intolerance.) Should I omit all mention of the non-conformists, — of those noble seekers after truth, the early Quakers, — of such men as Richard Baxter? Would it, or would it not, be safe, in my critic's view, to use such material as, say, Sir James Stephen's account of that eminent man, for I think Sir James was not "evangelical." How far might I be allowed to explain the nature of the struggle from my own point of view, without the risk of being called hard names? Does Milton's "Areopagitica" belong to English literature? And was it a flagrant breach of some tacit compact on my part in commenting on English style the other day to read the passage

which I append in a foot-note for the benefit of my critic? \* Might I, or might I not, mention Edwards' "Gangraena;"† and how far is it allowable in a lecturer on history to draw parallels between ancient and modern times? I have always been wont to consider Bishop Jeremy Taylor's "Liberty of Prophecy" a part of English Literature, — a book in which I find the following passage: "We by this time are come to that pass we think we love not God except we hate our brother; and we have not the virtue of Religion except we persecute all religions but our own. For lukewarmness is so odious to God and man that we, proceeding furiously upon their mistakes, by supposing we preserve the body we destroy the soul of religion, or by being zealous for faith, or, which is all one, for that which we mistake for faith, *we are cold in charity, and so lose the reward of both.*"

It appears to me that any account of the intellectual life of those times, or indeed of any times, with the subject of religion left out, would be Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. But must I be a Baptist, or at least "evangelical" in my views, before I am permitted to teach the subject in any public institution of learning? And is this what is called making our schools "unsectarian"?

Again, to take an illustration from the subject of grammar, I was explaining the other day to one of my classes the theory of

\* "As, therefore, the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue unexercised and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. . . . Since, therefore, the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity *than by reading all manner of tractats and hearing all manner of reason.*"—*Areopagitica*, p. 45, *Arber's edition*. [I take the opportunity to recommend this admirable little series of cheap reprints of old English literature to my readers.]

† "Toleration," says this worthy, "is the grand design of the Devil: his masterpiece and chief engine he works by at this time to uphold his tottering kingdom. It is the most compendious, ready, sure way to destroy all religion, lay all waste, and bring in all evil; it is a most transcendent catholic and fundamental evil for this kingdom of any that can be imagined. As original sin is the most fundamental sin, all sin, having the seed and spawn of all in it, so a Toleration hath all errors in it and all evils."—*Edwards' Gangraena*, A. D. 1646.

the origin of language as it is held by nearly all the leading philologists of the present day, when one of the class asked me if I thought that the theory could be reconciled with the account in the Book of Genesis. I answered that I did not think it could by any possibility. What would my critic have had me say? Or is he prepared to maintain that no one is fit to teach philology in a public institution who does not believe that all modern theories can be reconciled with the Book of Genesis, or that no geologist should be allowed to open his mouth in such an institution who does not believe in a six-days' creation? This would be to take precisely the ground which the Inquisition took when it threw Galileo into prison, and logically it is the ground which all sects take when they attempt to stifle all teaching save their own, on the plea of all other teaching being "infidel." It is astonishing to me that our Protestant sectarians do not see that they thus lower themselves to the level of the Roman Catholics whom they denounce, by borrowing their pretensions to infallibility, and using the weapons of their intolerance.

Let me give my critic one more illustration from still another branch of teaching. It fell to my lot the other day to explain to a class, in connection with the name of Lord Bacon, and the literary history of the sixteenth century, the true nature of that inductive philosophy for which he did so much, and of that inductive reasoning which lies at the basis of their scientific pursuits. I was using the first chapter of Fowler's "Inductive Logic," and among the books upon my table were Mill's Logic, Sir John Herschel's "Discourse," and the recent learned and elaborate treatise on the Human Intellect by Prof. Porter, of Yale College. Of course I had to enter into the subject of cause and effect, and to point out the radical difference between the views of the materialistic and the intuitional schools. Was it, or was it not, my duty to rehearse the views of Hume and Mill, of Kant, and Hamilton, and the rest of the authorities, but to preserve a studied silence as to my own, for fear of unduly influencing the minds of my pupils? Or because in this case I happen to be in hearty accord with the "orthodox" views of Prof. Porter, was it legitimate for me to express an opinion, when, if I had chanced to agree with the unorthodox views of Mill, such an expression would have justly brought down upon me the abuse of my opponent? In what respect does the spoken word of a lecturer, differ from the written word of the writer, which was perhaps once itself a spoken word?

Suppose that my critic should write a book upon inductive methods of ascertaining public lecturers' opinions, and I should think it worth using in my instruction, — two rather violent suppositions, I confess, — should I be forced to expound his method without interposing any oral objection in regard to its sufficiency? My own method is to say to my hearers, "Gentlemen, this is the nature of the controversy, and these are the authorities. This is my opinion respecting it. You must know it in order that other parts of my instruction may be intelligible. But you are not to adopt it, but to form your own."

I would not give much even for instruction in the abstractions of mathematics which should carefully conceal from the students those metaphysical questions, respecting time and space, that have so close and intimate a connection with religion, that is to say, with theology. Any institution, not intended for school-boys, that should teach mathematics in that spirit might perhaps turn out good machinists and engine-drivers, but could hardly lay any claim to being considered an institution of learning.

I do not feel at all disturbed by the cases which my critic puts as against my argument for the utmost liberty of teaching. By all means, let us hear what his learned Jesuit has to say on the subject of transubstantiation and the immaculate conception. How else can we answer him? If he can bring such subjects legitimately into a course of instruction in astronomy, let us have them there, though I do not quite see how that is to be done. They would find an appropriate place in a course on history and literature. As a part of the record of human thought, these have a necessary, and therefore legitimate place there in Protestant as well as Catholic teaching of history, and the Protestant teacher has as good a right to say that he does not believe in them as his Roman Catholic brother has to say that he does. For a teacher on either side to say that he does or does not personally believe in any particular doctrine, whether of art, philosophy, or religion, is one thing; it is often absolutely needful to the clearness of his teaching to state his own point of view; to make himself unfairly a "propagandist" of any particular doctrine by attempting unduly to influence the minds of his pupils, is quite another thing. Yet, my opponent does not scruple, for the sake of exciting odium against me, because I do not believe in all respects as he does, to confound these things together in his argument.

In the case which he supposes of a Baptist professor lecturing on literature, if I tell him what I should do if I were one, I

shall be describing the course which I honestly attempt to follow in regard to my own opinions, which are not Baptist. Believing, as I do, that it is impossible to deal intelligibly with history or literature without basing my instruction upon some scheme of thought and some system of the universe, I endeavor to have opinions and to state them frankly as far as is necessary to make my instruction intelligible, giving fairly the counter view, if a point is disputed, and warning my students on all occasions, to accept no views of teacher or of book without examination: because no man can be said to have an opinion till he has formed it for himself. If, therefore, the Baptist professor were lecturing on the history of the seventeenth century, I would not have him omit the honorable history of his sect, or fail frankly to give in his adhesion to the tenets they professed. Then his students would know where to find him. If I were his pupil I should respect him, however much I might differ from his opinions. But if he shirked the subject when it was a proper part of the history he was pretending to explain, or if he concealed his real opinions, I should certainly petition to be excused from further attendance on his lectures.

Alas! for us, when writers as respectable as my opponent begin to talk of "the flimsy pretence of freedom of speech"! It is strange and sad to think of, that while in despotic Germany, "catholic" and "evangelical," "orthodox" and "rationalist" professors lecture side by side in perfect harmony, and with mutual respect, and students in search of Truth listen to them all, in this country, where we boast ourselves of our freedom, an honest man cannot raise his voice on subjects even remotely connected with theology without the attempt being made by men calling themselves the only true Christians to excite odium against him by calling him an "infidel." And the natural result of freedom on the one hand and repression on the other, is, that we are forced to borrow our "orthodox" theology, as well as our science and philosophy, mainly from Germany. Without freedom of speech there can be no freedom of thought; and thus our young men and young women grow up timid, hypocritical, and time-servers. Let me copy some words of Mr. Maurice, the eminent professor of Moral Philosophy at English Cambridge, which I took great satisfaction in quoting the other day to one of my classes. Prof. Maurice is a member of the Anglican Church, though I do not know that he can be counted "evangelical," as I do not know precisely the definition of that term. He is a disciple of

Coleridge, who furnished me with that word "Bibliolatry," which seems to have given my critic some offence. "You pray to the living God," says Prof. Maurice, addressing a missionary about to depart to the East, "that he will enable heathens to think, that he will break the bonds that hinder them from thinking. Only when they begin to think freely can they renounce the devil's service and enter upon his. And what a lesson is this for us! We have learned to connect free-thinking with atheism. We warn our sons from free-thinking. I am well persuaded that we must, one and all, laymen and priests, repent of this language, and of the temper which it expresses. Unless we have much more free-thinking in our land than we have now or ever had, I fear we shall sink into devil-worshippers: unless the clergy cultivate free thought instead of checking it, they will become the devil's ministers, and not God's. . . . We should encourage men to desire much more freedom of thought than they ever desired; we should rebuke them only with being content with too little. The name of free-thinker, therefore, is one which we should honor in any one who claims it for himself; we should dispute his right to monopolize it." I am far from agreeing with Prof. Maurice's theology, but I recommend one or two of the first lectures in his little book \* to the thoughtful perusal of my critic.

Questions whose real merits are hidden when obscured by the mists of theological prejudice become clear enough when applied to some other topic. What would my opponent think of my fairness in teaching Political Economy, if I were to give my students but one side of disputed questions? Yet it is very plain that but one side, say of the question of Protection *versus* Free Trade, can be right. Should I be justified, on the plea of its being my duty to avoid all propagation of error, to suppress altogether the side which I did not believe in myself?

When members of the Board of Education having charge of three of our Normal Schools invited me to lecture, as I could find opportunity, to the pupils in those schools on History and Literature, and when, in return for such lectures, my excellent friends, ex-Governor Washburn and Secretary White undertook to help me supply a temporary deficiency in the English department of our own school by giving interesting courses of lectures to my older classes on the Law of Business and on Civil Polity,

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\* "Conflict of Good and Evil in our Day."

I presume that they felt confidence enough in me to believe that I could discriminate between the respective positions of a stranger invited to lecture to pupils not his own, a professor lecturing to his own pupils, and a lecturer addressing a miscellaneous public audience. I assure my critic that I can make the discrimination, and that though I am the same man in either case, and in either case hope to be true to my convictions, my valued friends the principals of those Normal Schools can best tell him whether I have ever made any dishonorable use of my opportunities. I can appeal to them the more willingly, because they are entirely untainted with my heresies. But it suggests to me the question whether that could be called an "unsectarian" school into which none but "Evangelical" lecturers were permitted to enter.

The discrimination which every fair-minded man would make seems to me to be this: A lecturer addressing an audience only occasionally, especially if it be an audience of young persons, should always bear in mind that he has no such opportunity to explain himself as he has to a class to whom he is giving systematic instruction. He would therefore justly be expected to confine himself to topics which are either not in dispute, or to those on which no misconception can arise in the minds of his hearers, leaving it to the responsible teachers to handle other topics. In pursuing this course he need not be unfaithful to himself, and within such limitations he has ample scope to make himself useful.

The case is different with regard to his own pupils, who are constantly under his instruction. There he attempts to deal with subjects as wholes, and to develop all sides of a question, and I do not see how he is to do that except in accordance with some system. My instruction in history, for instance, is based upon a certain philosophy of history, the one, namely, which I believe in, a philosophy differing on the one hand from that which a Roman Catholic professor would adopt as much as it does from that of a Comtian on the other. I do not see how I am to be intelligible to my students unless they understand my philosophy; and I do not see, on the other hand, why explaining my philosophy need be confounded, as it constantly is by my critic, with the attempt to impose it on my pupils, or with what he is pleased to call "infidel propagandism."

Again, the position of a public lecturer addressing a miscellaneous audience of adults is different from that of a teacher attempting to give systematic instruction. I think he may reasonably give himself more latitude in emphasizing his individual views,



for his object is rather to stimulate thought than to give systematic teaching. For my part, I like no lectures better than those with which I most heartily disagree; for I find none more profitable to listen to. Of course a lecturer should observe rules of courtesy; should not needlessly offend the sensibilities of those with whom he differs. If, in my earnestness, I have ever given just cause of offence on this score to my evening auditors, I am very sorry, but I shall not select as a judge an auditor who heard but one lecture.

I am sorry for my critic's "young relatives," but I do not see what, acting upon his own principles, he can do in the case except place them in some safe "Evangelical" monastery, if such a thing can be found, and institute at once, in connection with their studies, and, in all their reading, an "Index Expurgatorius," in imitation of the Romish one; in which I greatly fear he will have to include the larger part of the current literature of the day, including, Mr. Editor, your issue of the 17th instant, unless it should be thought that for the bane of my communication you had furnished a sufficient antidote in the shape of the comments of my critic. The last number, for instance, of that venerable quarterly, the *North American Review*, contains an exceedingly dangerous article on the state of religion in Great Britain, by Prof. Goldwin Smith; and to proscribe a public lecturer for dealing with such subjects when such books are lying on every counter is much like forbidding a man to bring a lighted match into a house on fire.

There is much heresy lurking in Prof. Lowell's last poem, but I am afraid my critic's young relatives have read it. I think, indeed, I quoted a part of it in a lecture on poetry as a beautiful specimen of contemporary literature. It may have been, however, that I only read from the safer part. That clever English review, the "Fortnightly," which contains so much of the brightest and freshest of English thought, is sadly leavened with the doctrines of Auguste Comte; and I mention it the more readily, as I have myself no faith whatever — though my opponent, in his entire ignorance of what my real faith is, will perhaps find difficulty in believing it — in any scheme of atheism or materialism. On the other hand, — happier in this than my opponent, — I have no *fear* whatever of anything the materialist or atheist can say. I read their writings myself, and I tell my students in philosophy that they have no right to an opinion on philosophical questions till they have read them too.

I do not believe, however, that his monastic system would succeed. In the thirty years during which I have had a large

acquaintance among young people, and an opportunity to watch the career of many former pupils of my own, my experience all goes to show that the freest system is the safest. Some of the worst specimens of humanity I have ever seen have been the direct fruit of my critic's repressive policy.

When I was appointed Professor of Literature in the Institute of Technology, I did not accept the place that I might teach only an emasculate History and an emasculate Literature; and such would History and Literature be with no mention made of the subject of Religion. No directions were given me as to what I was or was not to say, nor do I know at this moment the opinion of the government on the great questions of freedom of thought and freedom of teaching which we have been discussing. I speak, therefore, only for myself when I say that in my judgment it would be better that the halls of a school of learning should forever remain empty, that not one stone even should remain to mark the spot where it stood, rather than that it should surrender, at the bidding of any sect or any party, its absolute right to the free and untrammelled search after truth, to the free utterance of all honest opinion. Surely there are denominational schools enough in the land where thought is fettered within the bonds of a creed. I am equally sure that there are men and women everywhere to-day who have confidence enough in truth to be willing to trust her; faith enough in freedom to allow their sons and daughters to follow wherever it may lead. It is in that faith that I have brought up my own boys, and they have arrived at man's estate without causing me to repent of my determination. I teach my pupils only as I teach my sons. If my opponent, instead of assuming to possess all truth, and calling me invidious names, for not agreeing with him, would honestly seek to know what I believe and teach, he would, I think, materially alter his views respecting me.

I hope I shall always discuss serious subjects in a reverent spirit, but if my dislike of Scribes and Pharisees, of those who thank God that they are not as other men, even as these "infidels," has ever led me to say anything in my public lectures that gave just ground of offence to any sincerely religious person, I am heartily sorry, and shall try not to repeat the error. Whether my critic, with the spirit which he showed respecting me, is an unprejudiced judge, I am quite willing to leave it to your readers to determine.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

W. P. ATKINSON.

## III.

Provoked with you for asking me questions, my dear——? If I could be provoked with you at all, it would be for *not* asking them. You have a claim on me for further explanation, which I will not lose a moment in meeting. As well as I can, will tell you the nature of a religious faith in which I find entire contentment.

God is a Father to me as much as to the most "Orthodox." When I am in trouble I pray, and when I am happy, too. I constantly try to find light and guidance in what is above me and beyond me, because I feel weak myself, and have lived long enough to have had my share of trials; and though I do not know *how* I get strength through this sense of dependence, I am sure it is the true attitude of mind. We call God Father without understanding his infinity, not really, as I think, because Jesus was a miraculous being, sent to *command* us to call him so, and turning water into wine to prove his mission, but simply because, when Jesus tells us so, we instinctively feel that he is right. He appeals to a religious sentiment which is a part of our nature. And Jesus saw it was so, not because he was a miraculous being, or because he was God himself,—a doctrine as incredible to me as the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation,—but because he was, though nothing but a human being like ourselves, so true to himself that he was the first to see it in the shape in which he taught it, though it would have come through some other channel even if he had not taught it; just as Newton was the first to proclaim the law of gravitation, though I think the world would have arrived at the law if Newton had never been born.

What we call Christianity to-day is to me the accumulated religious experience of all that part of human kind that was influenced by the religious revolution which began with the preaching of Jesus. It contains more of absolute religious truth than any other religion, but surely it is not, in any of its multifarious forms, absolute religion,—perhaps it does not contain all the elements of religious truth that are in the world now; nor do I see why mankind should not advance in religious as in all other kinds of knowledge, by the same *natural* methods. I think one of the results of modern physical science is going to be, by and by, more adequate conceptions of God through the

removal of childish superstitions. And with more adequate conceptions will come more and not less reverence, and truer and more heartfelt obedience. No doubt the conception of father and child is an inadequate one to express the *whole* of our relation to God, — for how can the finite have adequate conceptions of its relations to the infinite? — but by realizing all the love we can feel for the dearest of human beings, we come as near as we can to the conception of the love of God. I do not strive to realize *too* closely my relation to an unseen and infinite power, because I cannot realize it as I can my relation to other beings like myself; but I am sure Jesus was right when he said that the more we love those whom we can see, the more we shall love him, though we cannot see him.

I think that the natural way for our religious feeling to develop itself is in an earnest desire to be and do the best and highest that is in us; not any ascetic feeling, like the old superstitions about “mortifying the flesh,” and denying one’s self innocent happiness, which is just as needful to us as bread; but always to strive to bring out of ourselves, according to our natural dispositions, everything in us that is pure and true. Some in this effort have to go through sharp trials and temptations which other happier spirits escape; but to all these must come a sense of *Duty*, of obedience, and service to be done, and denial of the lower for the sake of the higher, — though always within the bounds of *healthymindedness*; for the best service is always done by healthy minds in healthy bodies. Gloomy and ascetic views of religion spring from morbid and unhealthy minds; it is recorded of Calvin that he was a dyspeptic.

Such thoughts as these are nowadays in the minds of a great many earnest persons, but in the sectarian creeds — which are all of man’s making — they are mixed up with gloomy views and dark superstitions. Science is destroying our childish belief in the miraculous by substituting the far greater miracles of Law; and the growth of enlightened and humane sentiments is slowly obliterating the grim features of Puritanism.

Rejection of belief in the miraculous nature of Jesus exposes us now to being called hard names; but I think that belief must soon go where belief in the Virgin and the Saints has already gone for all Protestants, and it will be found that all *real* religious truth will only be the stronger. Protestants in the time of Luther rejected the worship of Virgin and Saints; but did not then get beyond a superstitious reverence for the Bible and a mythological view of a Christ. These, now, are

passing away, and I suppose we must pardon some bigotry and some violence on the part of many who have been taught honestly to believe that all religion is bound up in their creed. I suppose the Spanish inquisitors were many of them sincere enough in burning heretics at the stake, and there are plenty of people nowadays who hardly understand the principles of toleration any better.

But what to do? In the first place I would have no fear. The worst, as I think, that can be said of sectarianism is that it is too often a system of terrorism. I would have the courage to think for myself, and feel sure that with an earnest purpose you will arrive at all the truth you need. Religion is not a matter of belief in creeds, and no power of pope or priest or church has any real right to come between you and your God. If you find help and comfort in going to church, I would go; but if you cannot believe the doctrine, and find the worship cold, and dead, and formal, I would stay at home. Religion does not consist in church-going, and Jesus never gave a better expression of real religious feeling than when he told his followers to enter into their closets when they prayed. I think there is a great deal of deadness and formality in all the churches, and a great deal of mean and hypocritical conformity covering up real skepticism; but there are also sincere and earnest persons in and out of all sects who never find any difficulty in understanding each other. Formerly there were bigoted and liberal sects: now each sect is split into a bigoted and a liberal party; and it is a sign to me that the reign of sectarianism, or what I might call Protestant Popery, is nearly at an end. You will find that the principle of the exclusive Protestant is at bottom precisely the same as the principle of the Roman Catholic. One sets up his infallible Pope or Church: the other his infallible "Evangelical" interpretation of the Bible; and one is as angry and intolerant as the other when his authority is denied. He cannot burn us now, but he can and does call us hard names.

I have arrived at a firm faith by thinking for myself and trying to do my duty; and what I am not afraid of for myself I am not afraid of for you. Did you ever read Wordsworth's Ode to Duty and his character of a Happy Warrior? I am very sorry that my course came to an end before I had an opportunity to lecture on Wordsworth. He has been very much to me. But I do not know that there is anything more beautiful in his poetry than those verses of the Roman Catholic Father Newman, which, perhaps, you remember my reading once in a lecture on poetry

beginning "Lead kindly Light." Thus we find the earnestness of real religious aspiration breaking through the crust of all creeds, even what seem to us the most superstitious.

I do not know that you will agree with me in all this, and it is not at all necessary that you should. Doubtless my views on many points are modified by personal peculiarities. Each one at last has an individual belief, the growth of his own character. Thus from having been much an invalid, and much engaged with books, I very probably underrate the value of social worship, even in its present form. Let each in such matters take the course which is best for *him*. Only I am very glad that anything that I said gave you confidence enough in me to ask for further explanation.

Affectionately, yours,

W. P. A.